

GRADING CATEGORY – E

NB Clubs should be aware that they will have to achieve Grade D no later than March 31st following promotion to Step 4. It may prove more cost effective to include these additional requirements in any ground development programme for the E Grade.

1. GROUND

The ground must give an overall appearance and impression of being a football ground suitable for the National League System.

It must be possible for spectators to view the match, either standing or seated, for the full length of at least 3 sides of the playing area. Where one side is designated as spectator-free, measures must be in place to ensure there is no unauthorised access.

The location of the ground, in so far as its relation to the conurbation whose name the club bears, or is traditionally associated with, must meet with the approval of both The Football Association and the Board of Directors or Management Committee of the league of which it is in membership.

The club must disclose plans and details of any proposed future move to a new stadium to both the league of which it is in membership and The Football Association.

The placement of any club which is the result of a merger of two or more clubs will be dealt with on its merits.

1.1 Security of Tenure

The club must either:

- 1.1.1 own the freehold of the ground, or
- 1.1.2 have a lease of the ground for the remainder of the season during which an inspection for grading is carried out and for the following season, or
- 1.1.3 possess an agreement for the use of the ground which is acceptable to The Football Association.

If the Club applying for the grading is in a ground share, that share must be on a ground which complies with the above requirements and the ground share agreement itself must be for a term which is acceptable to The Football Association in the circumstances of the particular ground share.

1.2 Ground Share

Ground sharing is permitted, but not in order to gain promotion or to avoid relegation. A ground sharing agreement should ideally have been in place for at least one full season prior to the grading inspection.

Where there is a ground share arrangement between two football clubs, priority of fixtures will be given to the club playing at the higher level within the National League System unless otherwise approved by the respective leagues.

Where a ground share is in place with another sport i.e. Athletics, Cricket, Rugby Union, Rugby League etc, the club must have full use of all facilities on match days.

1.3 Capacity

The Stadium must have a minimum safe capacity of 1,000, calculated by a competent person in accordance with the guidance given in the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds.

1.4 Boundary of Ground

The ground must be enclosed by a permanent boundary, which will prevent individuals from viewing the game from outside the ground. The boundary must be of sound construction of pre cast concrete, brick, breeze block or metal cladding with steel or concrete posts and be of a minimum height of 1.83 metres as measured from outside the ground.

Whilst lapped timber, latch panel wood fences and wire mesh fences with wooden posts might be acceptable, hedges, shrubs and/or trees will not normally be accepted.

Where one side of the ground is formed of private land / property, the fixed boundary of that private land / property may be acceptable as the boundary of the ground.

1.5 Clubhouse

There must be a clubhouse facility either on or adjacent to the ground and which should be open on match days to provide refreshments to spectators.

1.6 Car Parking

There should be adequate car parking facilities at or adjacent to the ground.

1.7 Pitch Perimeter Barrier

Except as detailed below, there must be a permanent fixed barrier of sound construction (e.g. concrete and steel) and free from all sharp edges surrounding the pitch on all sides which may be occupied by spectators. The height of the barrier should ideally not exceed 1.1 metres.

The barrier, if other than solid wall type of construction, may be infilled. Advertising boards are acceptable as a means of infill.

There must be a minimum of 1.83 metres between the touchline, goal line and the pitch perimeter barrier. NB for Grade A (The Football Conference National) a minimum of 2.25 metres is required.

A barrier need not be erected on any side not open to the public.

Immediately in front of an area of seated accommodation the boundary of the playing area may be indicated by means other than a permanent fixed barrier provided the Club is able to provide assurances that no spectator will be allowed to stand in this area to watch the match.

Where there is a walkway in front of a standing terrace which is itself fronted by a crush barrier that has been subject to an annual risk assessment and, if necessary, tested, an alternative to a fixed barrier (e.g. A-frames) may be used, provided no spectators are allowed to stand in this area to watch the match. The Club must implement a safety management system to ensure this and also to protect the integrity of the playing area.

(See also Appendix)

1.8 Pitch Standards

The playing surface will be grass, unless authorised by the respective Board of Directors or Management Committee, and must be of a high standard. It must be level and free from surface depressions and excessive undulations.

The maximum slope allowable shall not exceed an even gradient of vertical to horizontal 1 : 41 in any direction.

The playing surface must be maintained to the highest possible standards.

Set out below is the view of the International FA Board and FIFA with regard to artificial surfaces:

“The Board recognised the advances in artificial surface technology and the major benefits of using artificial surfaces in areas of climatic problems. It also recognised that artificial surfaces allowed multiple and extended use of facilities in urban environments. The Board mandated FIFA to create clear procedures for the use of artificial surfaces, to unify the quality system and apply it worldwide, taking into consideration the best resources and knowledge available.”

The matter is therefore under review.

1.9 Playing Area

The playing area must be a minimum of 100 metres x 64 metres and should conform to the requirements of the Laws of the Game.

Goal posts and goal net supports should be of professional manufacture and conform to the current safety requirements and to the requirements of the Laws of the Game.

(See also Appendix)

1.10 Technical Area

Two covered trainers' boxes clearly marked "Home" and "Away or Visitors" must be provided. They should be positioned an equal distance either side of the halfway line, a minimum of 3 metres apart.

Each box must be able to accommodate 8 adults under cover on fixed seats or benches. Where bench seating is provided, a minimum of 0.5 m must be allowed for each person (i.e. 8 persons require a minimum of 4 metres.). NB for Grade B there must be seating for 11 persons.

Portable trainers' boxes are permitted but must be securely fixed when in use.

The Technical Area, as defined within the Laws of the Game, must be marked out.

1.11 Safe Walkway

Clubs must provide for safe, unimpeded passage for players and officials between their dressing rooms and the pitch.

The use of protection designed products such as permanent structures or retractable tunnels to separate spectators and players/officials is recommended.

(See also Appendix)

1.12 Floodlighting

Floodlights must be provided to an average lux reading of 120. No single reading can be less than one quarter of the highest reading so as to ensure an even spread of light.

Reading shall be on a grid of 88 markings evenly spaced with the outside readings falling on the pitch boundary line. The average of all the readings is taken to be the average illumination level in lux of the floodlighting installation.

The certificate must have been issued no more than six months prior to the application.

An "approved" contractor is one which is in possession of the NICEIC (National Inspection Council for Electrical Installation Contracting) Approved Contractors' award or ISO 9000/BS 5750 (International Standards Organisation/British Standard) or is a member of the Electrical Contractors' Association.

The contractor must, when detailing the lux values, give confirmation in writing of the date when the illumination test equipment used was last calibrated.

When new or improved installations are being planned, an average lux reading of 180 should be provided.

1.13 Public Address System

A public address system must be provided which is clearly audible in all those areas of the ground which can be occupied by spectators.

1.14 Entrances

There must be at least 2 spectator entrances to control the ingress of spectators. These must be controlled by fully operational turnstiles of the revolving type and must be suitably housed and lit.

It must be possible to gain access to the spectator viewing areas from the turnstiles via a bound surface to a minimum width of 1 metre.

1.15 Exits

The location and number of ground exits must be approved by a competent person and comply with the requirements of the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds.

All exits must be clearly signed, ideally with "running man" signs, and are to be kept clear and free from obstructions.

1.16 Lighting

(See Appendix)

1.17 Adjoining Pitches

Where deemed that they are likely to interfere with the playing of a match, ball games will not be played on adjoining pitches whilst league or cup matches are in progress.

1.18 Emergency Access

Access must be provided for the emergency services and maintained free from obstruction.

2. SPECTATOR FACILITIES

2.1 Spectator Accommodation

Development, in addition to hard standing, should ideally be on more than one side of the ground.

Covered accommodation, which should preferably be on 2 sides of the ground, must be of sound construction of timber/steel/brick/concrete or any combination of these materials. Existing timber stands are only acceptable subject to fire assessment.

The minimum covered accommodation must be 250, of which at least 150 must be seated. There should be a minimum of 150 seats located in one stand which may be inclusive of Directors/Committee and press seating. Whilst individual seats are preferred, existing bench seating may be permitted provided that it is in good repair and that individual spaces (min 500mm) are clearly marked.

All seating should afford a good view of the pitch and be clean, functional and in good condition.

There must be a minimum of 16 seats provided for Directors/Committee and guests with a minimum of 8 seats provided for the visiting club. These seats must be clearly marked "Home" and "Away Directors".

Additional seating may be provided in other areas of the ground. However, these seats are not to be classed as being "in lieu" of the number shown above.

Standing spectators are not allowed in or near a seated spectator stand where they can obstruct views.

Areas where no spectators are permitted to stand must be clearly marked with yellow hatched markings.

Hard standing to a minimum width of 1 metre, measured from the spectator side of the pitch perimeter barrier, must be provided on all 4 sides of the ground, unless a different configuration exists (see paragraph 1). The surface must be of a bound material.

2.2 Press Seating

A minimum of 2 seats must be provided with lighting and writing facilities for use by the press and other media.

2.3 Terracing

Where terracing is provided, it must comply with the requirements of the Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds. All terracing must be in a sound condition. Terracing that is crumbling, has grass / weeds growing through it or has broken or loose concrete will not be accepted.

Grass banking, areas of grass or other forms of soft spectator standing areas (e.g. ash, pebbles, gravel etc) may not be acceptable in the ground.

2.4 Toilets

Toilets must be located within the ground and must be accessible to both male and female spectators.

The following minimum toilet facilities must be provided in total, excluding those located in any clubhouse:

Male: 2 urinals or equivalent and 1 WC

Female: 2 WCs

In addition, wash hand basins with running water, warm air hand driers and/or paper towel dispenser with towels and waste paper bins must be provided in each toilet area.

All toilet areas must be in working order, with operational lighting, supplied with toilet paper and maintained to a high level of cleanliness.

These facilities may be of the temporary or mobile type and must be connected to the mains supply. They must be fully accessible with permanent access.

2.5 Refreshment Facilities

2.5.1 Directors/Committee/Guests

A separate room shall be made available in which refreshments for Directors/Committee and guests can be served. This area must be able to accommodate a minimum of 16 persons with nearby toilet facilities.

2.5.2 Spectators

Refreshment facilities must be provided at the ground. These facilities may be of a temporary or mobile type.

2.6 Disabled Facilities

(See Appendix)

3. DRESSING ROOM FACILITIES

3.1 Players

Separate dressing rooms must be provided for both teams within the enclosed area of the ground. The dressing rooms must be of sound construction and be of a permanent nature. Existing dressing room dimensions will be acceptable provided they are a minimum of 12 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas. However, clubs wishing to progress should be aware of the need to increase to a minimum size of 18 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas. Where clubs are planning to build new dressing rooms these must be a minimum size of 18 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas. Each dressing room must have the following:

A shower area comprising of at least 4 showerheads

1 wash hand basin

(All of the above must have hot and cold running water)

At least 1 WC.

There must be a treatment table in each dressing room.

3.2 Match Officials

The size of the match officials' dressing room must be a minimum of 4 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas. When new dressing rooms are being constructed the match officials' room should be a minimum of 6 square metres in size, excluding shower and toilet areas.

Each match officials' dressing room must have the following:

At least 1 shower and 1 wash hand basin (both with hot and cold running water).

At least 1 WC.

Provision should be made for separate dressing rooms for both male and female match officials.

Where new dressing rooms are being constructed or existing ones are being re-designed, separate purpose built facilities for both male and female match officials must be provided.

There must be an audible electronic warning device (bell or buzzer) in working order located in the match officials' dressing room and which is linked to the players' dressing rooms.

All dressing room areas must be maintained to a high level of cleanliness and be secure on match days.

4. MEDICAL

A stretcher must be provided for the removal of injured players from the pitch.

(See also Appendix)

APPENDIX

1 GROUND

1.7 Pitch Perimeter Barrier

Whatever system is employed, a club should be mindful of its responsibility to ensure spectator safety and minimise the possibility of unauthorised incursions on to the playing area.

1.9 Playing Area

Reference should be made to the Goalpost Safety information published by The Football Association and, in particular, it should be noted that the use of metal cup hooks will be prohibited from season 2007/08 when they may constitute a reason for a match to be postponed.

1.11 Safe Walkway

The design of the safe walkway will inevitably differ from ground to ground and it will rarely guarantee the safe passage of players and match officials unless supplemented by stewards. A club should implement procedures appropriate to the particular structure and be ready respond to on the field situations which might affect spectator behaviour.

1.16 Lighting

Whilst their installation is strongly recommended, neither working nor emergency lighting is any longer a grading requirement. Clubs are reminded that they have a responsibility to ensure the safety of spectators entering, leaving and moving about the ground and, if a ground is used in non-daylight hours, adequate artificial lighting should be provided. Further, consideration must be given by a club to its procedures in the event of a power failure.

2. SPECTATOR FACILITIES

2.6 Disabled Facilities

A club must take full account of the needs of disabled spectators and be mindful of its obligations under the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Reference may be made to the publications / data sheets issued by both The Football Association and the Football Foundation.

No specific requirement is currently included in the ground grading criteria but The Football Association strongly recommends that access is provided to both a covered viewing area and toilet and refreshment facilities.

4. MEDICAL

All clubs must provide first aid equipment, including a stretcher, for the use of players and spectators. Its location in the ground, if other than in a dedicated treatment room, should be clearly marked by notices placed in the dressing rooms for both teams and match officials.

There must be a nominated and suitably qualified person (minimum FA Emergency Aid Course) in attendance to assist with spectator problems unless the St John Ambulance Brigade, Red Cross Society or other capable agency are in attendance. The requirements of the Guide to Safety at Sports Ground are for one first aider per 1000 anticipated spectators, with a minimum of two.

If a crowd of less than 2000 is anticipated, known and practiced arrangements should be in place to summon either a doctor or NHS ambulance alternative. For crowds of over 2000, an experienced crowd doctor should be in attendance.

NB The above in no way purports to be a comprehensive list of Health and Safety issues which it is the responsibility of a club to address. Clubs are recommended to arrange regular safety audits conducted by persons with the appropriate expertise.